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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO THE REPORT  
BY THE OSCE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES, KNUT  
VOLLEBAEK

Post is authorized to make the following statement at the  
November 27 meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna:

Begin Text:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Vollebaek back to the  
Permanent Council and thanks him for his insightful report.

Mr. Ambassador, we also thank you for sharing your thoughts  
on the role of the OSCE in conflict prevention. Rarely have  
we heard such a clear assessment of the potential of the  
OSCE, and such a concise explanation of why the OSCE must  
play a fundamental role in conflict prevention and  
resolution.

We share your concern that there has been a shift away from a  
sense of common purpose and common values. In recent years, a  
few participating States have prevented effective OSCE action  
in support of the values and commitments which we have all  
pledged to uphold. We agree that the OSCE should indeed  
redouble its efforts to find solutions to the protracted  
conflicts in our region.

But to do this, the OSCE needs the support of all  
participating States. The OSCE's comprehensive definition of  
security, which includes the human, economic and  
political-military dimensions, is directly relevant to the  
challenges we face. We have the tools at hand ) we just  
have to use them constructively.

Ambassador Vollebaek, we strongly support your ongoing  
efforts to call attention to the rights and needs of members  
of ethnic minorities and internally displaced persons in the  
region. Your September trip to Georgia, including Abkhazia,  
as well as your staff's participation in the joint HCNM-ODIHR  
assessment mission in mid-October, were valuable  
contributions towards protection of the vulnerable  
communities there.

We sincerely regret that you were denied access to South  
Ossetia, and regret that the assessment mission was denied  
access to Tskhinvali from the south. In the future, we hope  
access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia  
will be granted willingly, not only to missions like yours,  
but also to OSCE and EU monitors. We also hope efforts like  
yours will help highlight the need for an incident response  
mechanism to deal with ongoing violence and abuses, and  
further the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced  
persons.

We support as well your efforts to assist in the resolution  
of the conflict in Transnistria through the organization of  
the November roundtable in Odessa for the 5 plus 2 Mediators  
and Observers.

The United States commends your essential work to advance  
human rights and improve policing and inter-ethnic relations

throughout the OSCE area. Recent experience has unfortunately demonstrated that allowing inter-ethnic tensions to go unresolved poses the real possibility of open conflict.

Ambassador Vollebaek, we wish you every success in your work in the coming year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

End text.  
RICE